McLaury (W. M.)

*REPORT OF*

W. M. McLAURY, PRESIDENT,

TO THE

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE

# SYRIAN SOCIETY

AT THE

SURGEON GEN'L'S OFFICE
538
LIBRARY.

FIRST ANNIVERSARY HELD IN THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK,

N. Y., MAY 4, 1893.

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## *To the Members and Friends of the Syrian Society of New York:*

At the close of the first year of the existence of this Society I am able to report results much beyond my anticipations when the Society was first started.

The object of the Society is to promote the welfare of the Syrian community of this city, extending not only sympathy and aid to the newly-arrived and assisting them in finding employment, but by means of an Industrial Home and School to prepare them for the duties of American citizenship.

The night school has been established now ten months and those who have most closely watched the management of these schools have expressed their surprise at what has been achieved. The scholars are bright and apt, exhibiting a docility that is remarkable. The first two months the day school was under the care and teaching of Miss Fisher, who had lived several years in Syria, which gave her some advantages over one who had not had her experience and travel. Her health not being good she was compelled to relinquish her position on September 1st.

From September to April 1st Mrs. Felits had charge of the day school. I think she was very successful in imparting instruction to the Syrian children. Miss T. Egbert, who has been in charge but one month, has yet to prove what she can do. She begins well.

In making mention of the teachers of our school I must call the attention of the Society to the gratuitous services of Mrs. Eliza Burnz, an eminent teacher of phonography and phonetic spelling, who, with great generosity and kindness of heart, spent two hours three days in the week teaching those children how to speak and read English by the aid of her improvement, and I might say her invention, which she called phonetic print. I believe much of the rapid advancement of the Syrian people, old and young, to be due to her earnest effort.

Mrs. C. Putnam is another active and very generous worker who has taught the children to sew. She and her friend Miss Montgomery, from Brook-

lyn, have given their time and effort to this work from pure benevolence and kindness of heart, with no hope of reward except that of a satisfactory feeling that they were doing something for the general good of humanity. I know these ladies have deprived themselves of needed rest and time that they could illy spare from household duties. I hope they will find satisfaction in having performed noble, self-sacrificing deeds for humanity's sake.

Next I would call the attention of the Society to the teacher of the Night School, Mr. Selem F. Haddah. He is employed at arduous work during the day, yet he devotes two hours five evenings of each week, from May 1st to the present time, to the noble work of teaching and drilling the young men and boys of his race and nation, foregoing all the pleasures and recreations that young men of his age naturally crave. I call him a hero, worthy of imitation. This work and effort of his has been wholly gratuitous.

The claims of the Society for a charter were so plainly stated and urged by Mrs. DePeyster, backed and sustained by our legal counselor, D. McLean Shaw, Esq., that the State Board of Charters readily granted the same, with all due deference to the names of the incorporators, two of whom are ladies.

We are now fairly afloat, and crave the kindly sympathy and support of the benevolent citizens of New York to the crying necessities of the Syrian Colony of this city. We are all aware that there is plenty of sympathy and money to support every deserving cause, if it can be properly brought before the thoughtful, earnest citizens of New York, who are too happy to aid by time and money and effort every scheme that has for its object the amelioration of human suffering and even the suffering of animals.

The Trustees and officers of the Syrian Society have performed the duties appertaining to their respective offices with a fidelity and zeal worthy of all commendation.

Dr. Ameen F. Haddad, a Syrian graduate of Bierut College, Syria, and also of the New York University, who may be called the father of this

Society, has put a marvelous amount of labor and effort in this work. He has been the projector and founder of this scheme to benefit his countrymen. In addition to performing the arduous duties of Secretary, he has had a general supervision of the schools, furnishing and preparing the rooms, getting up entertainments for the amusement of the children and for the benefit of the Society, performing duties equally as great and more onerous than those of any principal of public schools in New York city.

We call him a prince of a royal line, more ancient than that of any king or potentate of Europe. We believe his name should be Amier, instead of Ameen, and that it might be possible to trace his ancestry back to the Ben Haddad, King of Syria, mentioned in the Bible, where he was employed 940 B.C. He was employed by Asa, King of Judea, to assist him to resist the encroachment of Baasha, King of Israel. For this he was paid by Asa with gold from the Temple of Jerusalem, for which he was censured by the prophets.

Our worthy Treasurer, who has performed her duties with scrupulous care, has informed you that we are out of debt, but practically without funds for further work. We now appeal to all who are here present to help the Society with funds to the extent of their ability; also bring its claims to their friends and co-workers in humanity's cause everywhere, that the good work commenced in behalf of the Syrians may continue. Donations or bequests for the benefit of the Syrian Colony in New York may be sent to any officer of the Syrian Society, which will be duly acknowledged by such officer receiving the same.

Now, in taking leave of you as President of the Society, I wish to thank you as officers and members for the uniform kindness and forbearance with which I have been treated.

Although I am no longer President of the Society, I shall not cease to take interest in its welfare mentally, morally, and financially.

Now, in congratulating my successor, I also congratulate you in having in your presiding officer a man so competent in every way, so energetic and enthusiastic in the cause. Just the man to carry it through to a successful issue.

Now, kind friends, with the highest hopes and wishes for the Syrian Society and the Syrian Colony, I will introduce the President Elect, Mr. Frederick W. Perry, who will now address you. Addresses were also made by Rev. C. Madison Peters, Rev. Stephen Merritt, and Louis Klopsch, Ph.D.

Quoting from the New York *Tribune* of October 2, 1892, in an illustrated article, it says in the Syrian colony the salutation on entering a room is far more likely to be *Asaalam alaicoom* than "How do you do?"

There are many permanent dwellers here and nearly all who come look forward to citizenship as the one great prize.

There are but few Mohammedans among them. A majority profess the Roman Catholic faith, while Presbyterian, Maronite, Protestant Episcopal, Greek, and Orthodox Catholic Creeds all have adherents among the members of the colony.

"While the Syrian of the peasant class who comes to this country is generally totally ignorant of the English language and American business methods, he is quick to learn, and ready to grasp every opportunity of doing so. To aid in this work there has been formed the Syrian Society of New York, with Dr. Wm. M. McLaury as President; Dr. Edw. P. Thwing, Vice-President; Mrs. H. E. Leverich, of Brooklyn, Treasurer; and Dr. Ameen F. Haddad, a native of Syria, and a graduate of Bierut College and the New York University Medical School, secretary. This Society in May last opened an evening school for the benefit of those employed during the day, and now has a class of thirty members. A day school was opened later, which is presided over by Miss Helen M. Fisher, who gained her experience in the American Female Seminary at Bierut, and whose services are given to the Society without charge. She has now a class of fifty, over half of whom are constant attendants. The Society has rooms at No. 95 Washington Street, and its work in promoting the welfare of the Syrian community, and, by means of an Industrial home and school, in preparing them for the duties of American citizenship, is supported entirely by voluntary contributions.

"Those who can afford it, bring with them to this country and retain for use on state occasions, their gorgeous native costumes, and while the regular American dress is seldom departed from in every-day life, a feast or wedding will bring out costumes which are gay with silver and gold, and covered with embroidery. All through the colony, glimpses of a life foreign to America may be seen, and the veil of mystery which has ever hung over the peoples and countries of the Orient has one little corner lifted in this section of the town. Here in its perfection is that mixture of the Occident and the Orient which is at once interesting and perplexing. These men are members of an alien race, who do their bookkeeping wrong end to, who make ice-cream on the sidewalk in full view of a prospective customer, who wear baggy trousers and smoke pipes with six feet of stem and a quart of water in the bowl, who make their boast that no man shaves his upper lip, and help out the barber by holding the basin when undergoing a shampoo, and pick out from the stock the razor which they wish to be shaved with, who read and write backward when they read and write at all, and when they get tired of playing backgammon take a string of parti-colored beads, and with faces as grave and immobile as if carved out of mahogany, proceed, in some peculiar fashion of their own, to extract as much employment from them as an American girl will from her first doll.

"With reference to this colony, these points should be remembered—that the colony is growing in numbers and wealth constantly; that its members are anxious to learn American ways and manners, and to become citizens as soon as the law will permit; that they are, as a rule, quiet, orderly, sober, and industrious people, who are beginning to see the benefits derived from united effort, and who are destined to become in the near future, under the leadership of men who are thoroughly acquainted with their capabilities and needs, a factor in the body politic which will make itself felt for good."

A Syrian newspaper is published in New York by Dr. Arbeely, the first native Syrian to come to New York.

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